(b) whether Government have taken stringent measures for the safety of Indian citizens in other Gulf countries in addition to Iraq; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Government have issued a travel advisory asking Indian citizens to defer their visits to Iraq for the time being and have placed restrictions on travel of Indians to Iraq. The Government have reiterated its instructions to the Missions in the Gulf to extend all possible assistance to the Indian nationals in Iraq desiring to return to India. The Indian Mission in Baghdad has been instructed to visit work sites of Indian citizens to the extent possible to enquire after their safety and well-being and to take appropriate steps to ensure this.

(b) and (c) Indian Missions in the Gulf countries and Government are monitoring the developments that may have a bearing on the safety of the Indian citizens in other Gulf countries. A telephone based helpline has been made operational in Embassy of India, Saudi Arabia to address various concerns, including questions of safety, if any, of Indian citizens there. Monthly "open house" are held in the Missions in the Gulf countries in order to understand first hand and to address the concerns, including safety aspects, of the Indian community.

Unhelpful attitude of Indian Embassy in France

1684. SHRI VIJAY J DARDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government are aware on 16th May, 2004 an Indian and his wife, while landing at Paris Airport, lost their return ticket, foreign exchange, credit card, and on his persistent request to Indian Embassy, no help whatsoever from Indian Embassy was given to this stranded Indian couple;

(b) if so, the reason for this unhelpful attitude adopted by the Indian Embassy; and

(c) what are the MEA guidelines to Indian Embassies in such cases?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) The Government are aware of the incident. An enquiry in the matter has revealed that an official from

Embassy of India, Paris, rendered necessary assistance to the the stranded couple. On receipt of information, the official coordinated with the Airlines concerned and also contacted the relatives of the couple in India so that the needful could be done.

(c) Indian Missions/Posts abroad take up all complaints/problems of stranded Indians with the local authorities concerned and render all possible assistance to them.

Fishermen detained by Pakistan Security Agencies

1685. SHRI LEKHRAJ BACHANI:
SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that Indian fishermen and boats are being taken into custody by the Pakistan Security Agency while fishing;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the number of fishermen presently detained and boats confiscated by Pakistan Security Agencies including for Gujarat State;

(c) the steps proposed to be taken to resolve this matter; and

(d) whether Government are considering signing an agreement with the Pakistan Authorities on the lines of the agreement between India and Sri Lanka?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) As per available information, 412 Indian fishermen with 75 boats are presently under Pakistan's custody.

(c) and (d) Government, through diplomatic channels, have been consistently taking up the issue of early release and repatriation of the Indian fishermen with Pakistan. The matter was also raised during the Foreign Secretary level talks on June 27-28, 2004 in New Delhi, and again during the Secretary (Culture) level talks on promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields, held in New Delhi on August 3-4, 2004. In the Joint Statement of June 28, 2004, the two sides agreed to take steps to release all apprehended fishermen in each other's custody, and work for the return of unintentionally transgressing fishermen and their boats from the high seas without apprehending them.